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## **California's Quiet but Crucial Role in Shaping Fuel Economy Standards**

By **JIM MOTAVALLI**

When the Obama administration **completed** the Corporate Average Fuel Economy, or CAFE, standards for 2017 to 2025 last month, it was a milestone in a long and frequently contentious process, but not the last word.

California, alone among the states with the power to set its own emissions policy, was at the negotiating table throughout the process and reserved the right to certify the results through its own legislative channels. The state consequently retains the authority to throw a monkey wrench into the agreement, which calls for automakers' fleets to reach an average of 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025, but environmental advocates and industry leaders alike expect an easy approval.

"California and the states that follow it represent 40 percent of the new car market," Phyllis Cuttino, director of the **Clean Energy Program** at the Pew Charitable Trusts, said in a telephone interview. "That's why you've seen such support from the automakers for an integrated rule."

Jamie Knapp, coordinator of the **California Clean Cars Campaign**, a loose alliance representing public and private interests, said the integrated national program, in which the federal standard effectively would become that of California, would deliver for the state. "It's in the state's interests to collaborate, because we all benefit," she said in a telephone interview.

Led by the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, a lobbying group representing the interests of 12 major automakers, the industry readily agreed to the 2012 to 2016 standards, announced in 2009, because it saw a clear path to a unified program in which California's Air Resources Board and the federal government would share standards. And it remains on board for the standards through 2025.

According to Stanley Young, a spokesman for the board, the state's endorsement will be determined in a process similar to that used for **the last round of CAFE standards**, which apply for 2012 to 2016. "The Air Resources Board staff prepared a separate resolution for consideration by the full board that deems the federal program to be equivalent to that of California," he said

in a telephone interview. "We retain our own program, but this process effectively allows a single national program to go forth."

The regulatory draft was sent out for final state review on Friday, and a 45-day comment period was scheduled to begin on Sept. 14. Mr. Young said the board would consider the proposed plan in mid-November.

The federal government has exclusive rights to set fuel economy mandates, while California's standards cover emissions from the operation of vehicles. In the past, this resulted in automakers building cars to one set of specifications for part of the country and to another for California and those states that adhered to its emissions standards.

"I'm not holding my breath to see how this comes out," Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign at the Center for Auto Safety, a consumer advocate, said in a telephone interview. "Everyone was in the room together."

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